

# United States Senate

December 2, 2021

Charles P. Rettig, Commissioner  
Internal Revenue Service  
1111 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20224

Dear Commissioner Rettig:

We are concerned to hear reports that the National Taxpayer Advocate held discussions with IRS officials about a temporary shutdown of IRS phone lines in order to clear the backlog of 5.9 million unprocessed individual returns and 2.7 million amended returns.<sup>1</sup> We write to you today to urge that the Internal Revenue Service keep its telephone lines open while clearing the unprecedented backlog of unprocessed returns.

The IRS has an ongoing problem of answering taxpayer phone calls. During the 2021 filing season, the IRS only answered 9% of incoming calls. This is less than previous filing seasons and has continued a downward trend since 2018.<sup>2</sup>

We understand the incredible strain that the IRS faces, especially given the challenges with understaffing and the additional workload brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, we appreciate your and the Agency's efforts to reduce the extensive backlog of tax returns. However, we believe that temporarily closing telephone lines is an ineffective, ultimately, and counterproductive method of addressing the systemic issues that face your organization.

We request that you take all actions necessary to improve customer service outcomes at the IRS and commit to keeping your telephone lines open in an effort to provide America's taxpayers with the high quality of service that they rightfully expect.

Please provide our offices with information no later than December 10, 2021 regarding any steps that the IRS is taking to improve telephone services—rather than temporary suspension of services—while still addressing the tax return backlog ahead of the upcoming tax filing season.

Sincerely,



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Robert Menendez  
United States Senator



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Bill Cassidy, M.D.  
United States Senator

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<sup>1</sup> Allyson Versprille & David Hood, *IRS Denies Temporary Phone Line Shutdown Under Consideration*, BLOOMBERG (November 22, 2021), <https://www.bgov.com/core/news/#!/articles/R2ZYLPDWX2PX>.

<sup>2</sup> Erin Collins, *Review of the 2021 Filing Season*, TAXPAYER ADVOCATE SERV. (2021), [https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/JRC22\\_SAO\\_ReviewFiling.pdf](https://www.taxpayeradvocate.irs.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/JRC22_SAO_ReviewFiling.pdf).

*Benjamin L. Cardin*

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Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator

*Ron Wyden*

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Senator Ron Wyden  
Chairman